PASSIVE SMOKING

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PETER DEELEY: Presenter

The controversy over smoking in the workplace has taken an unexpected twist with new scientific evidence that passive smoking doesn't cause cancer. A European working group of scientists has concluded that the risks of contracting cancer from tobacco smoke in the air is so small as to be statistically insignificant. Although the scientists were commissioned by tobacco manufacturers to carry out the study they say their findings are independent and unbiased. Amanda Sanford joins me from the anti-smoking group ASH, Action on Smoking and Health. This seems to be complete contradiction of what you've been campaigning for for years.

AMANDA SANFORD: ASH

Well that's right. It also goes against the evidence which has been amassed over the years by other independent scientists who have found quite clearly that there is a definite link between passive smoking and lung cancer. So it is very, very surprising indeed that this group of scientists is saying that there's no evidence at all. But I mean the fact that their study has been commissioned by the tobacco industry rather casts doubt on the veracity of their findings I think.

PETER DEELEY:

That's difficult for you to say because these are scientists with proper qualifications, they say it doesn't matter where the money comes from.

AMANDA SANFORD:

No, I mean yes. They may well... I'm not trying to cast dispersions on the actual individual's qualifications, I'm sure they are well qualified, but it does seem rather surprising that other leading scientists in the field were totally unaware of this report coming out and didn't seem to know who these people were. I mean certainly one of them has worked for Imperial Tobacco before, so I wouldn't be at all surprised to find that the other people in the group also have some connection, however indirect, with the tobacco industry.

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PETER DEELEY:

Doesn't it suggest though that it's time for a balance?

AMANDA SANFORD:

Well, I think the point is that clearly the main purpose of this report is the industry wants just simply to spread confusion over the issue of passive smoking. They see there have been many many studies now which have showed quite clearly that passive smoking is harmful to non-smokers, but what the industry wants to do is just to spread confusion and therefore to try and delay any legislative change and no doubt they'll be using this report to lobby governments to do just that.

PETER DEELEY:

Amanda Sanford, thanks very much.

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